



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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President Shelly meets with U.S. EPA to discuss carbon dioxide ruling



President Shelly met with federal officials from the U.S. EPA to discuss the upcoming rulemaking decision for carbon dioxide. (Photo by Michele Morris)

SANTA FE—The U.S. EPA is expected to release their proposed carbon dioxide air quality supplemental ruling for Indian Country in mid-October.

Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly met with Janet McCabe, acting assistant administrator for the Office of Air and Radiation, along with Jane Nishida, acting assistant administrator for the Office of International and Tribal Affairs and Jared Blumenfeld, regional administrator for U.S. EPA Region 9 on Sept. 15 in Santa Fe.

Joining the president were Navajo Nation representatives from Department of Justice, Navajo EPA, Division of Natural Resources and NTUA. The Navajo Nation delegation shared statistics demonstrating the economic disparities that exist on tribal lands.

Statistics from the Navajo Nation included the unemployment rate of 52 percent versus 6.3 percent for the U.S. More than 60 percent of Navajos

do not have telephone service; 32 percent don't have electricity; and 38 percent do not have running water.

The relevance of the statistics was to demonstrate the disadvantages facing Navajo tribal members with regard to basic necessities and economic development. Those figures were contrasted against the Nation's abundance of coal, more than 100 years worth, which is an economic boon and necessity for the tribe.

Recent air quality decisions by the U.S. EPA to limit the use of coal-fired power plants as an energy source have a negative impact on the tribal economy.

President Shelly said consultation with the U.S. EPA was absolutely critical for the proposed carbon dioxide ruling because the power plants located on the Navajo Nation provide tribal self-sufficiency.

"We just wrapped up the final BART decision for Navajo Generating Station

and completed a very complex rulemaking," President Shelly said. "Now we have the proposed carbon dioxide rulemaking before us."

He explained that the economy of the Navajo Nation is dependent upon the coal power plants, not only for employment but also for revenue streams from taxes, lease payments and other royalties that support the direct services to the Navajo people.

Despite the push for restrictions on coal-fired plants across the country, the tribal air quality has always passed standards set by the federal government.

President Shelly said, "Ever since such data started being recorded, the Navajo Nation air quality has always been good. Today, there is significantly less air pollution coming in from power plants on and near the Nation."

Blumenfeld commended President Shelly for his "hard work for the Navajo Nation" and said he will leave a lasting legacy for his work to protect public health and the environment.

McCabe echoed similar sentiments and said, "You are the most active tribal leader to advocate and conduct government-to-government discussions for every ruling."

"On behalf of the Obama administration, we are committed to working with the Navajo Nation as a sovereign entity and consider your comments before issuing a supplemental ruling," she added.

In Nov. 1984, the U.S. EPA enacted a policy for the administration of environmental programs on Indian reservations.

The policy was in accordance with the Federal Indian Policy that was enacted on Jan. 24, 1983.

The main themes of the policy stated "that the Federal Government will pursue the principle of Indian 'self-government' and that it will work directly with Tribal Governments on a 'government-to-government' basis."

Because of this, President Shelly said the U.S. EPA must carefully consider the tribal concerns and recommendations and make regulatory decisions that uphold trust responsibilities and obligations as a trustee.

His said the U.S. EPA needs to find a balance between economic development, progress and environmental protection that will allow the Navajo Nation to thrive in the years to come.

"We want to request for a public comment period extension from 30 to 45 days," President Shelly said. "Don't treat us similar to states, we are different and deserve to be treated as a sovereign."

Sixty years ago, the initial agreements for the power plants was negotiated by the federal government and power plant owners for long term sweetheart deals. Today, the Navajo Nation stands poised to realize the benefits of renewed leases that it has negotiated directly with the power plant owners, which are lessees to the Nation.

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